

Focused Monitoring Report for Washington South Supervisory Union



**On-site Review:
February 01-05, 2010**



Student Support Division
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***The Monitoring Team wishes to thank everyone in the
Washington South Supervisory Union
for being gracious and flexible hosts.***

I. Description of Monitoring Authority and Focused Monitoring

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), (20 U.S.C. 1400 (c)(1)), provides federal funds to assist states in educating children with disabilities and requires each participating state to ensure that school districts and other publicly-funded educational agencies in the state comply with the requirements of IDEA and its implementing regulations. Further, Section 616 of IDEA states that the primary focus of Federal and State monitoring activities shall be on improving education results and functional outcomes for all children with disabilities and ensuring that States meet the program requirements with a particular emphasis on those requirements that are most closely related to improving educational results for children with disabilities. Vermont state law requires local education agencies to provide appropriate special education and related services and requires the Vermont Department of Education (VTDOE) to establish, monitor, and enforce regulations governing special education programs in the Vermont public schools and all institutions wholly or partly supported by the state. The state has adopted regulations implementing those requirements which are administered by VTDOE. VTDOE supervises and conducts the general supervision process in furtherance of the state's obligations under IDEA and Vermont law.

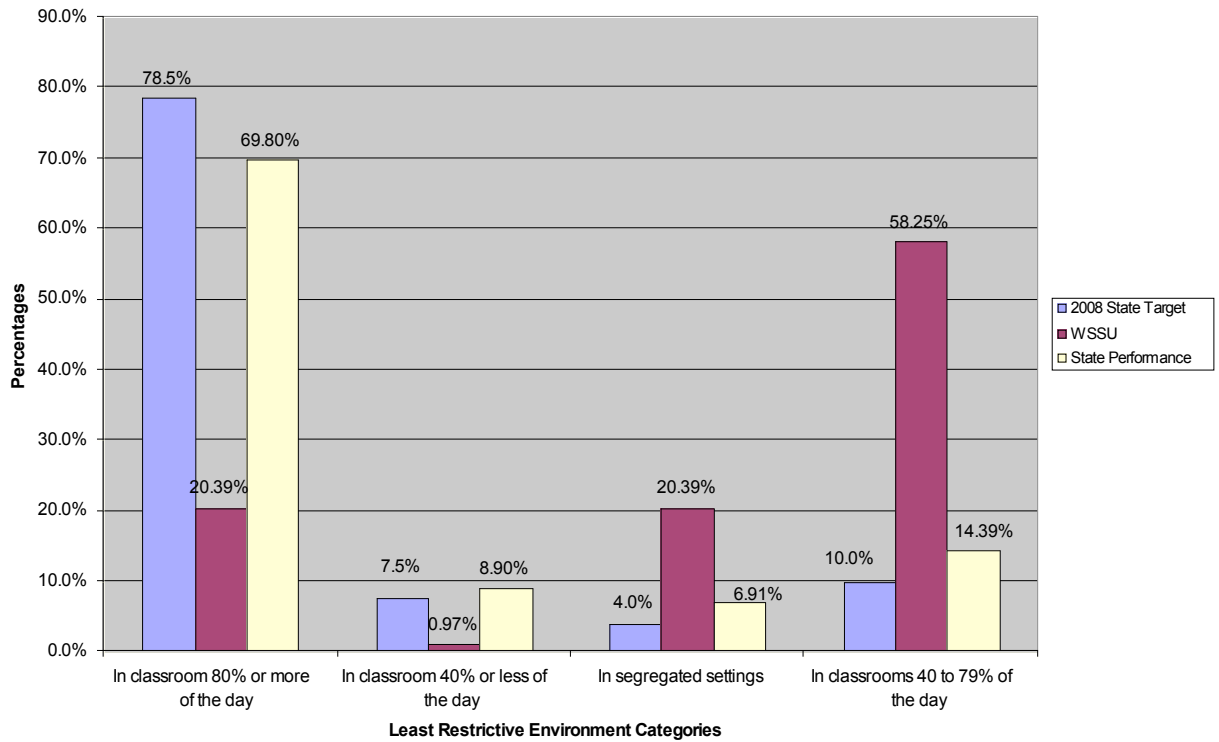
Focused Monitoring is a new approach to assess compliance with federal and state special education law and regulations while also addressing critical performance areas. It is a shift from a culture of compliance to a culture of accountability. It places the focus of a monitoring review on results versus process. The principles of Focused Monitoring are identified as follows:

- Focused Monitoring includes a limited number of priorities chosen by a diverse group of stakeholders.
- Available data are used to select priorities that will improve student educational performance, increase independence for children with disabilities, and lead to full participation in society.
- A limited number of indicators are identified within each priority area and are used as the basis for district ranking and selection for on-site reviews.
- A Focused Monitoring system is data and information-based. Data-based information is used to allocate limited resources in the direction of most need, which are determined by identifying what is most likely to lead to improvement in student performance.
- There is a relationship between monitoring and corrective actions—solutions are linked to identified problems. Corrective actions are designed to create systemic changes that result in improved student performance.
- Families have the opportunity to provide information on a continuous basis.

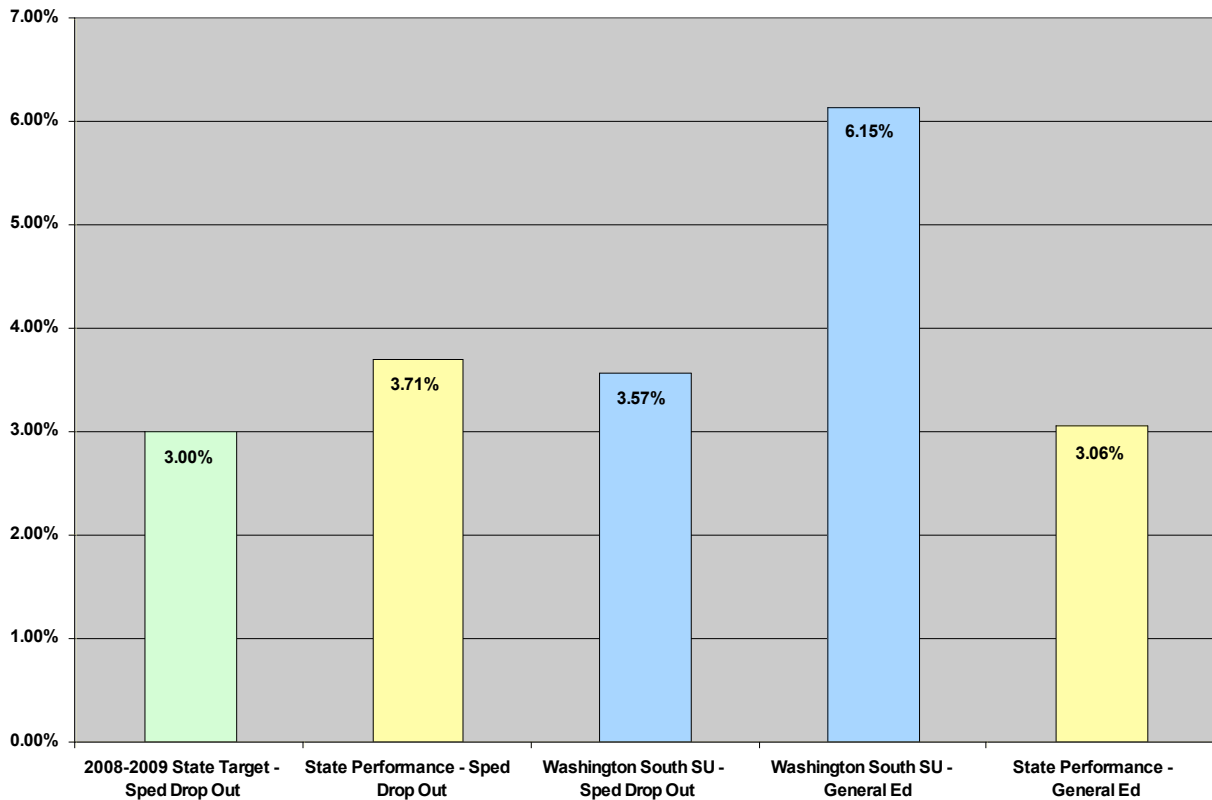
II. Focused Monitoring Methodology

The Washington South Supervisory Union (WSSU) was selected for an on-site visit based upon their performance on the 2008 State Performance Plan (SPP) Indicators 5 and 2 regarding Least Restrictive Environment and Student Dropout Rate. See the graphs below which document the 2007-2008 state target, our average performance as a state and WSSU's performance in regards to the indicators:

2008 WSSU Educational Placement Data



**Washington South Supervisory Union
Sped and General Ed Dropout - 2007-2008**



The on-site Focused Monitoring review was conducted during the week of February 1-5, 2010. The team visited the Roxbury and Northfield Elementary Schools, the Northfield Middle/High School and Essential Early Education programs located within both elementary school buildings in the supervisory union. The Monitoring Team reviewed and analyzed the following data prior to and during the on-site review.

Data Reviewed

- Indicator data by disability, grade, and school building
- LEA Profile information submitted by school building administrators
- Vermont Agency of Human Services Community Profile 2007
- Local Report of State Performance Plan indicators
- Special education policies/procedures/forms/practices
- Family/school collaboration related to the indicator(s) via parent surveys and interviews
- Trend data for the dropout rate with the WSSU
- Educational Support Team procedures
- District discipline procedures

Parent Surveys

An online survey based on families' educational experiences in the Washington South Supervisory Union was available for all parents of students within the supervisory union. Washington South Supervisory Union provided documentation of adequate and appropriate public notice regarding the survey. The online survey was completed by 21 parents. In addition, ten parents were interviewed in person or over the phone.

On-Site Interviews

Interviews were conducted with seven general and special education administrators from the district schools and supervisory union level, sixteen general and special education teachers, two related service providers, three planning room personnel and four Educational Support Team coordinators. While on-site the Focused Monitoring Team also interviewed six students.

Record Reviews

Focused file reviews were conducted for thirty-eight students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), Section 504 Plans, Educational Support Team (EST) Plans, Behavioral Plans and Functional Behavior Assessments.

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations were conducted in each of the following schools and/or programs:

- 1. Northfield Elementary School (Pre-K-5)**
- 2. Northfield Elementary Pre-school Program**
- 3. Roxbury Elementary Pre-school Program**

4. **Northfield High School (9-12)**
5. **Northfield Middle and High School (6-8)**
6. **Students Taking Alternative Routes (STAR) Program**
7. **Assigned Academic Assistance (AAA) classroom**

III. Supervisory Union Background

The following information is taken from the 2007 Agency of Human Services (AHS) Community Profile. The AHS profiles use supervisory union boundaries when presenting data for a particular community. Thus, the information below concerns the towns which are part of the Washington South Supervisory Union; they are Northfield and Roxbury.

Within these towns there are Northfield and Roxbury Elementary Schools and the Northfield Middle/High School.

<i>Washington South Supervisory Union</i>		
School Name	Grades Served	2009- 2010 Enrollment
Northfield Elementary School	(Pre-K-5)	284
Northfield Middle/High School	(6-12)	383
Roxbury Elementary School	(Pre-K-6)	50

According to the Agency of Human Services, the total population for this community was 6,376 in 2006.

The following information comes directly from the AHS profile:

Percent of children (ages 0-4) in families receiving welfare (proxy for poverty) in 2006

Vermont	WSSU Community	Difference
9.1%	8.0%	-1.1%

Percent of children (ages 5-17) in families receiving welfare in 2006

Vermont	WSSU Community	Difference
4.3%	4.2%	- 0.1%

Percent of kindergartners who met standards of readiness in 5 domains in 2007:

Vermont	WSSU Community	Difference
44%	49%	+ 5.0%

Teen pregnancy rate per 1,000 females ages 15-17 in 2004

Vermont	WSSU Community	Difference
15.8	16.4	+ 0.6

Percent of 8th grade students who have () in the past 30 days in 2007

	Vermont	WSSU Community	Difference
Smoked Cigarettes	7%	10%	+ 3%
Smoked Marijuana	8%	10%	+ 2%
Used Alcohol	19 %	55 %	+ 36%

Reports of child abuse and neglect per 10,000 children ages 0-17 in 2006

Vermont	WSSU Community	Difference
84.5	74.7	- 9.8

2006 Custody rate for children (per 10,000 ages 10-17) deemed:

	Vermont	WSSU Community	Difference
Unmanageable	28.5	25.1	- 3.4
Delinquent	52.7	81.7	+ 29.0

Socioeconomic Data:

	Vermont	WSSU Community	Difference
Average Annual Wage (2006)	\$34,974	\$33,880*	- \$1,094
Median Family Income (1999)	\$48,625	\$50,951	+ \$2,326
Percent of People above poverty level (1999)	90.6%	92.9%	+ 2.30%

* as measured by county, not community

IV. Commendations for the LEA

Relative to the State Performance Plan Indicator(s) 2 (Dropout Rate) and 5 (Free Appropriate Public Education in the Least Restrictive Environment), the following efforts and/or initiatives have been implemented within the district schools and the alternative program operated by the supervisory union. These activities have been recognized as effective components in Washington South's current educational systems which engage students and families as well as affecting a positive school climate and positive student outcomes.

- Diligence has been taken this school year to ensure that the Least Restrictive Environment data submitted in December 2009 Child Count for school-aged children reflected the actual level as indicated on their current Individualized Education Program. As a result, the December 2009 submitted count, although currently unverified at the State level, indicates a greater inclusion percentage for students with disabilities in the public school environments.
- There is evidence of a supporting and engaging climate throughout the buildings of the WSSU, including Rachel's Challenge chains, displayed student work, the welcoming picture of Elvis the one-eyed frog and other signs that promote positive attitudes and behaviors.
- The SHINE program, in its 17th year of existence and open to all students, provides a student-directed opportunity to develop school and community projects that promote positive school climate, teamwork, citizenship and engages families in a positive school activity.
- The Unified Sports Program has been praised by parents, staff, and students as an initiative that has promoted positive student interactions and engaged families in its activities.
- A further review of the 2008-09 dropout list showed that 9 of the 11 students listed actually continued with their education on an alternative path to graduation, the majority through an Act 176 Plan.
- The STAR Program, an alternative program operated by the district, assists students in the completion of their graduation requirements and serves as a dropout prevention measure for students within this community.
- We observed evidence of assistive technology (i.e. communication devices, laptops Alpha Smarts, Smart Boards, the IXL math program, the ability to download books onto student ipods) throughout the district that supported student access and performance within the general education curriculum and environment.
- The special education and Educational Support Team files that were reviewed were well-organized, which made for easier review by the monitoring team and, we are certain, makes for easier access to records by district staff when necessary.
- The WSSU maintains strong connections to Norwich University which includes the use of campus facilities, guest lecturing by some of the university professors, the access to

university courses at a reduced credit hour rate by WSSU students, student teaching and student mentoring programs.

- In response to the removal of funding for after-school homework clubs, Assigned Academic Assistance (AAA) and Enrichment rooms have been established each period of the school day to assist academically at-risk high school and middle school students
- The Back Pack program implemented in both the Northfield and Roxbury Schools provide students with healthy snacks and meals as well as promoting a greater awareness of good nutritional practices.

V. LEA Areas for Improvement Related to the Priority Indicators

The Monitoring Team must validate a concern through three separate sources of data to determine that the concern is an area for improvement. These Triangulated Areas For Improvement (TAFI) make certain that the information is truly valid and reliable. During the Monitoring Team's review of WSSU, no issues were triangulated requiring the implementation of an Improvement Plan.

Other issues or areas of concern (see Section VI of this report) that cannot be triangulated are identified, but they do not rise to the level of an area for required improvement. The Washington South Supervisory Union is encouraged to consider these issues and concerns within an Improvement Plan.

VI. Areas of Concern Related to the Indicators

- The Child Count reporting for December 2008 did not accurately reflect students' educational placements and suggested that the majority of students on Individualized Education Programs were out of the general education classroom more than 20% of their school day. The preliminary, not yet verified, 2009 Child Count suggests that a significantly higher percentage of students on IEPs were in the general education environment at least 80% of their school day.
- WSSU and local community resources demonstrate a limited capacity to serve secondary students with an Emotional Disturbance or a Learning Impairment resulting in a higher percentage of out-placed students with these disabling conditions.
- The over-reliance on outside agencies inhibits WSSU's ability to build an internal capacity to address behavioral and emotional issues of students.
- There is a lack of a data-based record keeping system that could be employed to effectively facilitate evidence-based academic and behavioral interventions for students.
- IEPs and multi-year plans developed contractually by the staff at the Randolph Technical and Career Center's Vocational Incentive Program do not fully meet state documentation requirements. By regulation, WSSU bears the responsibility for ensuring compliance for their students enrolled in this program.
- The WSSU early childhood education program is recognized as a valid asset and integral part of the elementary school community that provides opportunity for young children to

develop foundational skills necessary for their future success in school. However, we also observed where the early childhood programs were isolated from the K-12 educational system. Curriculum development was consistently referred to as a K-12 initiative. Their opportunity to collaborate and communicate with other district staff was described as limited.

- The purpose and procedures for the appropriate use of the Northfield Elementary School de-escalation room must be reviewed and clarified to all staff. Procedures developed must ensure that students are not left unattended in this room.
- Diligence needs to be taken in the review of WSSU dropout counts to ensure that reliable and valid data is submitted to the State and also to identify when alternative graduation pathways for students are implemented.
- Turnover of administration and teaching staff within the WSSU has had a lingering and negative effect on teacher understanding of priorities and systematic consistency.
- Procedures for the transition of students from Part C to Part B services, EEE/Preschool to Kindergarten, and the elementary schools to the middle school need to be reviewed, developed and implemented.
- The emerging efforts that include the Roxbury staff in the district's professional development opportunities and initiatives must be continued.
- We heard evidence (from parents, staff and students) of the positive changes in school climate and procedures. We strongly support the continued development of a unified curriculum for WSSU, of positive behavioral supports, and the implementation of a data-based decision making model within each school.

VII. Non-compliance with State and Federal Rules & Regulations

Findings of Noncompliance

Non-compliance finding are violations of State and/or Federal Rules and Regulations. The following findings of non-compliance must be corrected within one year from the date of this report. Washington South Supervisory Union must include a response to each these findings in their Improvement Plan.

Systemic Findings:

- WSSU needs to develop Child Find activities that consistently meet their obligation to locate and identify students with a disability ages 3-21. *State Regulation 2360.3.5*
- Some WSSU staff (PK-12) are opting not to file paperwork to initiate Educational Support Team reviews or to conduct comprehensive special education evaluations despite significant developmental, academic, and/or disciplinary concerns or data clearly warranting such a referral. *State Regulation 2360.3.5 (1) (i)(ii)*

Individual Findings

- The LRE description for a high school student used the pre-school category for 80% rather than the school-aged category for the same percentage. *State Regulation 2363.1(b)*
- A multi-year plan developed within the supervisory union did not specify the alternate credits the student would be attaining. *State Regulation 2120.8.2.1(c)*
- A multi-year plan was not considered for a student until an upper high school level and only upon failing to complete a general education course. *State Regulation 2120.8.2.1(c)*
- A multi-year plan was developed but not attached to a student's IEP suggesting the plan was not addressed in the IEP Team meeting as per State regulation. *State Regulation 2120.8.2.1(c)*
- Several IEPs and Evaluation Reports did not appropriately identify the disability category for students based upon their most recent evaluation or the disability areas as evaluated by the evaluation plan. *State Regulation 2362.2.5 (a)(1)(i)*
- Follow-up evaluations and referrals to Section 504 Teams recommended by the Evaluation Planning Team were not found within the student file. *State Regulation 2362.2.6*
- The current IEP was not found in a file for a student whose previous IEP ended on 1/15/10. *State Regulation 2363.3*
- A special education service was not being provided for a student as was modified (12/09) on the student's current IEP. *State Regulation 2363.13 (a)*
- Attendance of required school-aged and pre-school IEP Team members was not documented on the IEP cover page. *State Regulation 2363.4*
- Form 5b was used to document changes made to an IEP without having a formal meeting but did not secure a parent signature prior to initiating the service change. *State Regulation 2363.7 (c)(3)*
- In one instance, Form 6 was used incorrectly to document parental consent to move a child from the Family Infant Toddler Program to the Essential Early Education program as well as the consent for the initial provision of Part B services. *State Regulation 2360.5.7(f)*
- Two initial evaluations did not meet the 60 day timeline and the notices of delay did not document a reason that would be considered an exceptional circumstance for the delay. *State Regulation 2362.2.3 (b)*
- Two reevaluations were not completed within the three year anniversary date of the previous evaluation. *State Regulation 2362.2.4 (a)*
- Initials of required Evaluation Planning Team members were not on two of the completed Evaluation Reports indicating their agreement with the team's eligibility decision. *State Regulation 2362.2.5(5)*

- The Adverse Effect section on two Evaluation Reports lacked appropriate documentation for the -1.0 standard deviation or lowest 15th percent as proof of an adverse effect in a basic skill area. *State Regulation 2362 (d)*
- Adverse Effect section did not include the team's conclusion statement on the completed Evaluation Report for two files. *State Regulation 2362.2.5(a)(1)(ii)*

VIII. Improvement Plan Process

Upon receiving the final report following a Focused Monitoring visit, the LEA is required to initiate the development of an Improvement Plan (which includes improvement activities related to the priority indicator and correction of non-compliance) with your VTDOE Monitoring Facilitator within a period of 30 calendar days from the date of the final report. The Improvement Plan should be a comprehensive, interdisciplinary plan that targets LEA-wide improvement. In developing the plan, the LEA should consider the “areas for improvement related to the indicators”, “areas of concern related to the indicators,” “findings of non-compliance,” and the “supporting evidence,” “corrective actions,” and “required evidence of correction” contained within the findings. The VTDOE Monitoring Facilitator will provide technical assistance and consultation during the development of the Improvement Plan. It is important to note that improvement activities may extend beyond one year, but the correction of non-compliance must happen within one year from the date of written notification via the final report.

In order to assure that the Improvement Plan is comprehensive, interdisciplinary, and LEA-wide, the plan must be developed by a collaborative team which includes general and special education stakeholders. This plan must not be a uniquely special education response developed in isolation from other LEA initiatives. The VTDOE Monitoring Facilitator provides technical assistance to the team in the vein of a facilitator. The Monitoring Facilitator may not provide the technical assistance that the LEA identifies it needs, but rather functions as a liaison for needed services.

Development of the Improvement Plan will include:

- Use of the VTDOE template to develop the Improvement Plan
- Review the areas of noncompliance and the expected evidence of change in the final report
- Coordination of the Improvement Plan with other LEA initiatives
- Addressing the following components per activity:
 - What specific tasks/activities are planned to address the targeted area?
 - Why these particular tasks/activities were deemed most appropriate?
 - When the tasks/activities will be completed?
 - Who will complete the tasks/activities?
 - Why this activity will work to bring the LEA into compliance?
 - Who will monitor the progress and completion of activities?
 - What are the needed resources (fiscal, human) within/outside the LEA that will be used to implement change?
 - What are the deliverables, products, materials, documentation, or action plans that will be developed?
 - How will progress be monitored to ensure that the expected changes take place (self-assessment) and

- What are the intended outcomes/impact related to the targeted area?

The VTDOE Monitoring Team reviews the LEA's proposed Improvement Plan, requesting clarifications and revisions, as necessary. Upon approval of the Improvement Plan, the LEA is issued an approval letter that outlines the schedule of reporting the LEA's progress monitoring to VTDOE. The purpose of this Monitoring Progress Report is to provide the LEA with a format in which to demonstrate evidence of their efforts to correct the deficiencies identified through the Focused Monitoring process. In addition, the process allows the LEA to monitor and evaluate the success of their Improvement Plan activities. The scheduling of the progress reports depends on the complexity of the Improvement Plan and the individual needs of the LEA.

Prior to the one year anniversary of notification via the final monitoring report, an Evidence of Change review meeting is scheduled between LEA representatives and the VTDOE Monitoring Facilitator to assess whether the LEA has met or is making adequate progress towards meeting the required evidence of change at the expected standard as set by the collaborative team and approved by the VTDOE. Based on the results of the meeting, the VTDOE determines whether (1) the LEA has met the standards required and the Improvement Plan is officially closed, (2) the LEA has not met the standards required and additional time will be allowed with Improvement Plan amendments, or (3) sanctions will be imposed. The correction of non-compliance must occur within the one year timeline, the above refers to improvement activities related to the priority indicator.

Your Monitoring Team contact for all follow up activities is:

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